

# Investigating History

## Grade 4, Unit 3

### European Arrival in North America



**What effects did interactions among societies have over time on people, land, and power in North America?**

#### Framing the Unit

In this unit, students explore how interactions between societies shaped people, land, and power in North America over time. Students begin by examining the world before large-scale European colonization. Students investigate how interactions between societies can be traced through maps, objects, and stories.

The unit then shifts to European expansion, examining how voyages, choices, and government support led to conquest and colonization, with lasting effects on Indigenous peoples.

In the final cluster, students analyze how North America had changed by 1800, using maps, timelines, and texts to compare changes in land control, power, and daily life, while also considering whose perspectives are most visible in historical sources and whose are missing.

Throughout the unit, students use a timeline and multiple sources to understand history as an ongoing story shaped by interaction and perspective.

*Prepare to teach this unit by exploring the [Background Brief: European Exploration of North America](#), which was designed to help you build content knowledge through a variety of resources. The brief also highlights current perspectives and research—along with potential misconceptions and any debates you should know about—so you can present this unit with confidence.*

#### Enduring Understandings

1. Societies have interacted throughout history, and these interactions can be understood by examining evidence. Interactions often affected people, land, and power.
2. When societies seek greater control over resources and decision-making, interactions between groups often change in lasting ways.

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3. Changes in land and power affect different groups in different ways, leading people to respond differently over time depending on their goals, available resources, and positions of power.

*Connections to Current Events and Issues*

Connections to today's world and students' lives are built into this unit. Other contemporary connections could be added or developed for various topics of study within this unit, and we encourage you to take advantage of opportunities to connect students' learning to contemporary local, national, and global developments that may arise as you teach this unit. Some ideas for linking this unit to current events and issues include:

- The United Nations provides ongoing reporting on global migration through its [International Organization for Migration](#). The site includes maps, data, and student-friendly explanations about why people move and what happens when new groups interact. These resources help students connect early interactions in the unit to modern-day migration and cultural exchange.
- "[An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States](#)," by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, offers a retelling of U.S. history from the perspective of Indigenous peoples, centering their experiences, resistance, and survival. Instead of focusing on exploration and expansion as progress, the book examines how colonization led to displacement, violence, and long-term effects on Indigenous communities.
- Debates over how to remember European exploration continue. Across the United States, cities and states are replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day to recognize the effects of colonization on Indigenous communities. This shift highlights how perspectives about whose stories should be centered change over time.
- [We Are Water Protectors](#) (2020) is a picture book written by Carole Lindstrom and illustrated by Michaela Goade. It celebrates Indigenous activism and environmental stewardship, inspired by real-life movements to protect clean water sources, particularly the 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests led by Indigenous communities.

*Vocabulary (in order of appearance)***Tier 3 Vocabulary**

primary source  
secondary source

Viking  
Columbian Exchange

**Priority Tier 2 Vocabulary**

interaction  
society

dependent  
voyage

conquest  
motivation

## Lesson Clusters

### *Cluster 1: Early Interactions (Lessons 1-8)*

**How did North American societies and other societies around the world interact before the 1400s?**

*Focus Standards: 4.T3.1, 4.T3.2, 4.T3.3, PS 1, PS 2, PS 4*

This cluster sets the stage for the unit by challenging the idea that North America was “waiting to be discovered.” Students investigate maps, objects, and stories to uncover evidence that societies around the world, including Indigenous societies in North America, were already interacting long before large-scale European colonization. Students learn that historians rely on different types of evidence to understand how these interactions shaped people, land, and power over time.

### *Cluster 2: Trade and Expansion (Lessons 9-16)*

**Why did the voyages of European nations across the Atlantic Ocean lead to more conquest and colonization in North America?**

*Focus Standards: 4.T3.3, PS 1, PS 2, PS 4*

In this cluster, students study how the search for trade routes by European sailors changed interactions in North America. They will compare what motivated different European nations to fund these voyages and how they affected other societies. Students will explain how the voyages to North America led to conquest and colonization, as people and governments made choices about wealth, power, land, and control.

### *Cluster 3: Impact of Conquest and Colonization (Lessons 17-23)*

**How did the increased European presence in North America change people, land, and power by the 1800s?**

*Focus Standards: 4.T3.1, 4.T3.2, 4.T3.3, PS 1, PS 2, PS 4*

In the final cluster, students investigate how interactions over time changed North America. They analyze maps, images, and texts to compare how different groups experienced change differently, while building an understanding that history looks different depending on whose perspective is centered. Students trace how increasing European presence led to growing pressure on land, shifting power, and unequal outcomes across groups.

This cluster also acts as a bridge to Unit 4, when the course transitions into a deeper study of westward expansion in the 1800s. Because of the chronological gap between units, the cluster intentionally emphasizes continuity and change over time rather than

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introducing a large amount of new content. Though it may not align as directly to multiple standards in the History/Social Science Framework, these lessons are critical for helping students make sense of the significant time jump and understand how earlier interactions set the stage for later expansion.

***Summative Assessment: European Arrival in North America (Lessons 24-25)***

*Focus Standards: 4.T3.1, 4.T3.2, 4.T3.3, PS 1, PS 4, SL.4.2*

During this unit, students examined how interactions between different societies shaped North America over time. They studied early Indigenous societies and their networks of exchange, the arrival and expansion of European nations, and the ways these interactions changed people, land, and power by the 1800s.

In this Summative Assessment, students demonstrate their understanding of how interactions shaped North America by creating a three-section booklet describing how people, land, and power in North America changed over time. A planning handout with guiding questions prompts students to organize their ideas before building their final booklet.

Each section focuses on one of the three aspects of change students learned about in this unit: people, land, and power. Using examples from across the unit, students explain how interactions over time impacted how people lived, who controlled or used land, and who made decisions or held authority.

To assess understanding of perspective and point of view, students also complete a short source-based task. They select a source with information about a specific person or group's perspective on some of the changes described in the booklet. An optional extension question prompts students to then choose a different person or group and compare their perspective.

This assessment measures students' ability to view historical content through the lenses of people, land, and power and to recognize that historical events were experienced differently depending on the groups that experienced them.

**Unit Focus Standards*****Content Standards***

- **4.T3.1:** Explain how historians studying the European voyages to the Americas use archaeological evidence, maps, illustrations, and texts produced in Europe at the time, and that all of these materials are called primary sources.
- **4.T3.2:** Explain who the Vikings were and describe evidence of their early encounters with Native Peoples along the North American Atlantic coast.
- **4.T3.3:** Trace on a map European explorations of North America and the Caribbean Islands in the 15th and 16th centuries (e.g., voyages of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, Jacques

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Cartier, Cristobal Colon [Christopher Columbus], Ferdinand Magellan, Juan Ponce De Leon, Amerigo Vespucci, Hernán Cortés), evaluate the reasons for the voyages, noting that they were part of an effort by European nations to expand their empires, find new routes for trade with Asia, new opportunities for colonization, and new natural resources; make a timeline of their landings and conquests.

*Practice Standards*

- **PS 1:** Evaluate the extent to which different individuals or groups have similar or different perspectives on a civic issue or concern.
- **PS 2:** Generate open and closed questions relevant to multiple aspects of a topic.
- **PS 4:** Identify the point of view represented in a source and discuss how a person's point of view might affect the way they represent an event or topic, distinguishing between facts and opinions in the source.

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Note: The Native Education Council does not rate or endorse curriculum materials. See the Curriculum Guidebook for more information.

## English Learner Consultants: English Learners Success Forum

Note: ELSF does not rate or endorse materials. See the Curriculum Guidebook for more information.

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